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<http://www.guardian.co.tt/lifestyle/2016-07-05/give-pan-chance-peace>



*The Peace Drums Steel Orchestra performs at the University of Delaware.*

The steelband movement is replete with locals who sacrifice a lot of time and energy to nurture the proliferation of the national instrument at home and abroad. Selwyn “Fruits” John is one such panman and he proudly stands alongside T&T steelband ambassadors like Ellie Mannette, Robert Greenidge, Clifford Alexis, Rudy “Two Leff” Smith, Othello Molineaux and Liam Teague, musicians who continue to expose and promote pan on the world stage.

Earlier this year, John, a key member of First Citizens Supernovas Steel Orchestra, was involved in a significant event which placed pan from Israel, of all places, centre stage at a prestigious American university. John’s participation actually began more than two decades ago through his affiliation with a university lecturer who works in Israel.

John related: “Knowing that I was from Trinidad and involved in pan, Professor Harvey Price befriended me about 25 years ago at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. When we met, he, and another American guy named George Whitmire, were experimenting on steel drums made from stainless steel material. Two of those drums are in Trinidad right now—Bertram ‘Butch’ Kellman has had one for about 20 years and I brought the other one this year which I intend placing at the grave of the late Jit Samaroo.

“Through my relationship with the professor, I was instrumental in acquiring pan instruments to be sent to Israel, where the professor was forming a steelband comprising some of his students. Three years ago the professor succeeded in forming a multi-denominational steelband of Muslims from Palestine, and Jews and Christians in the Galilee region of Israel. The idea behind this initiative was to get different peoples to communicate with each other.

“In October 2013, the professor, with Delaware’s Christian and Muslim associates in the village of Ibillin and the Jewish youth of Haifa, finally got the steelband up and running.

“This year, the Israeli steelband— The Peace Drums—went to the United States and played at various locations including New York, Philadelphia and Delaware. The main performance was at the University of Delaware and I was invited to give a lecture on steelband development and history. I got a tremendous reception from the Americans. Also speaking with me was Aneysa de Coteau, who spoke on the musical aspects of pan. It was moving seeing all these young, bright students giving a rousing ovation to this Trini panman.”

John believes that, despite the exposure given to the national instrument in the past, there is a lot of work still to be done globally. He said: “Pan Trinbago and the government of T&T have to get a lot more proactive and serious as pan instruments and music are in great demand abroad. The demand continues to outdistance the supply.

“The Americans are also desperate for people who can teach the pan and its music at college and university levels. Too many Trini pan people go out there just to play, ‘to eat ah food’, drink and have a good time, and there is serious work to be done to promote our national instrument, a lot more outside there. Pan is a lot deeper than just playing the instrument.”

The Peace Drums event was hosted by the University of Delaware and it was actually a month-long exercise with the Israel steelband at the University. John’s lecture was based on his overseas travels with pan and his involvement with various universities in the US.

John also revealed that his steelband, FC Supernovas, would be hosting a steelband gospel event at a local venue on October 1. He added: “The concert will be produced with a collaboration done with all churches, with various steelbands playing gospel music on the road between Eddie Hart Ground and Constantine Park in Tunapuna.

The intention is to see if we can reach souls in young people, for some sort of peace, of which the older generation would benefit at present. Right now we are in organisational phase seeking sponsorship from the various ministries to be involved with this event.

“The greatest achievement we hope to accomplish is for folks to see love, peace and harmony as the recipe for saving T&T, instead of crime. Gospel on the road in October will have some of the leading steelbands in our country. It will be beneficial in two ways because of the level of musicianship required of both instruments and tutors not only in places like Israel and abroad.”